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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

JORDAN'S ARMED FORCES

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Jordan's Armed Forces

Summary

The turmoil stirred up among Jordan's Palestinians by Israel's raid on three Palestinian towns on 13 November 1966 has underscored the decisive importance of Jordan's armed forces in sustaining King Husayn's regime. The army was first the humiliated victim of the Israeli assault and then was called upon to put down the ensuing Palestinian demonstrations against the regime. These developments have put a severe strain on the army's confidence in itself as an effective military force and have raised a question as to its reliability as a political instrument. The future security of the regime will depend largely on Husayn's success in retaining the loyalty of East Bank urban and northern elements who have acquired increasing responsibilities in the armed forces. The bedouin, who traditionally have been dominant, are a declining but still key factor. The Palestinians, who comprise two-thirds of the population, have been denied positions of power in the military and, because of their general antagonism toward the regime, will continue to be viewed with suspicion.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

The Army as a Military Force

1. The Jordan Arab Army is the lineal descendant of the bedouin Arab Legion which was recruited, organized, and subsidized by the British in the mandated territory of Trans-Jordan after World War I. It fought well against Israel in the Palestine War of 1948-49 and denied the Israelis complete control of Jerusalem and the surrounding Palestinian plateau. The creation of Jordan, following the 1949 armistice, through a merger of this area with Trans-Jordan produced a drastic change in the character of the Hashemite monarchy. Its population was tripled by the addition of the settled and more sophisticated Palestinians, who largely disapproved of their subordination to a bedouin-oriented regime.

2. In the upsurge of pan-Arab nationalist feeling that developed in the 1950s, direct British influence was eliminated. King Husayn and the other Jordanians who were trained in British military schools, nevertheless, have perpetuated the traditions and techniques developed under British tutelage. Their pride in the army's record and capability as a military force apparently is shared by most of the east Jordanians, who as a group are predominant in it. This pride remains one of the army's present strengths.

3. [redacted] it is adjudged superior in quality, unit for unit, to any other Arab army. [redacted] Jordan's army, if given a firm policy decision to fight, probably could hold parts of the West Bank against an Israeli attack for a short time. It would be at a serious disadvantage if the Israelis also launched a sustained air attack against the defending Jordanian force.

4. The army's assets include mobile, fairly up-to-date equipment, its small unit training is good, and its individual soldiers are rugged. It is hampered by its small size, has had insufficient

combined arms training, lacks experience in air-ground operations, and does not have an air defense [redacted] The logistical shortcomings would limit its effective period of full-scale combat operations to about one week.

5. Morale and discipline were good until Israel's 13 November raid. The humiliation and resentment among all ranks over that debacle was accompanied by widespread criticism of the defense policy and leadership of the King and his senior army leaders. As a result, the low morale of Jordan's armed forces constitutes their most serious present weakness and is a major concern of the regime.

6. Jordan's armed forces have a personnel strength of 50,875 of which about 5,000 are officers. [redacted]

7. The army has traditionally been a volunteer organization, but during the Palestinian disturbances in late November, when the Palestinians were agitating for a larger role in defending the West Bank, the government announced a decision to introduce conscription. Nonetheless, it is clear that conscripts will be carefully screened in order to eliminate potential subversives, and that the [redacted]

8. The over-all military budget for the last nine months of 1966 was $40 million. This was 27 percent of the total budget and eight percent of the gross national product. US aid is provided under the Military Assistance Program, and the UK also provides some assistance. Equipment procurement plans and the programmed expansion of the army's force level have created financial problems

which are complicated by the fact that payments due Jordan from the Cairo-dominated United Arab Command (UAC) are in arrears and are not likely to be received unless there is an improvement in inter-Arab relations.

9. Jordan has successfully resisted pressure from the UAC to procure Soviet arms and, encouraged by the recent US decision to accelerate aid shipments, now shows every intention of adhering firmly to the position that it should continue to seek arms and equipment only from Western sources. The army's US-supplied equipment includes medium tanks, self-propelled 105-mm howitzers, 155-mm guns, antitank weapons, small arms, trucks, and armored personnel carriers. British equipment includes light artillery pieces, armored and scout cars, and Landrover vehicles.

10. The air forces has mostly obsolescent British Hawker Hunter jet fighters but soon will have part of a squadron of US F-104s. The remainder of the squadron will be received later this year. Jordan also has an option to buy two additional F-104 squadrons. The Coast Guard has equipment largely of British origin which has been acquired through purchase or aid since 1952. Three US patrol craft were purchased in 1965.

11. Leadership of Jordan's armed forces is nominally vested in the commander in chief, Field Marshal Habis Majalli, but he has been a figurehead since a reorganization in 1965 stripped him of most of his authority. The reorganization involved the dismissal, over his objections, of a large number of uneducated and incompetent officers and improved the morale of younger, better-trained officers. It also paved the way for the development of a more effective, modern fighting force.

12. The effective head of Jordan's armed forces is the army's deputy commander in chief, Major General

Sharif Nasir

13. Major General Amir Khammash, chief of staff of the army, shares effective power in the army with Sharif Nasir. The 42-year-old Khammash is Jordan's most experienced and best-trained officer in modern weapons and tactics and is highly respected at all levels in the army.

The Army as a Political Instrument

14. Khammash is the archtype of officer upon whom the regime is increasingly dependent for capable and reliable leadership of the armed forces. He and most of the officers in this category come from towns in the northern sector of the East Bank. As a group they are balanced against the tribal-oriented bedouin from the central and southern areas on the East Bank who have been the traditional supporters of the monarchy.

15. Bedouin still comprise about a third of the army. More importantly, they make up about 70 percent of the personnel in the two armored brigades and about 50 percent of the royal guards brigade--the key units in the army from the standpoint of the regime's security. In four of the 27 regular infantry battalions they constitute roughly 70 percent of the total complement. Personnel from

the urban and northern areas of the East Bank are about 40 percent of the army's total strength. Thus, East Bankers--bedouin or urban-northerners--are numerically predominant in the army as a whole, though altogether they are only a third of the country's population.

16. The Palestinian two-thirds of the populace is represented by only 28 percent of the armed forces' total strength. Most of these are in the technical services; there are fewer in the artillery and fewer still in the infantry. Virtually none are in the armored units.

17. Husayn would like to win the allegiance of the Palestinians, and he has made efforts to do so. The endeavor probably is futile, however, since to most of them he is an anachronism The King's hopes for appeasing the Palestinians received a sharp and perhaps permanent setback when the 13 November Israeli raid discredited his moderate policy toward the Israelis.

18. The Palestinians' demonstrations against the King in the wake of the Israeli raid forced him to use army troops against them. Although the army has been called upon to suppress civil disturbances in the past, in this instance the action was particularly unpopular among many of the troops. This, together with their dissatisfaction over the regime's ineffectiveness against Israel, caused considerable grumbling.

19. It is not uncommon in the Middle East for armies to seize power after defeat on the battlefield and following a period of internal unrest during which civilian authorities have relied on armed forces to maintain themselves in power. This

has happened in both Syria and Egypt, for example. Armed coups also have occurred when popular dissatisfaction can find no peaceful means of forcing a change in the regime. Present conditions in Jordan are somewhat different, however, Jordan's defeat by Israel on 13 November was suffered in a limited engagement and the subsequent unrest has subsided. Moreover, the Palestinian portion of the populace in Jordan which is acutely dissatisfied has been denied direct access to key positions in the army from which it could move most effectively against the King.

20. The regime's security, thus, is largely dependent on the continued loyalty of the armed forces as they are now constituted and on its resistance to radical appeals for the overthrow of Husayn. The bedouin, by and large, seem certain to stand firm for the King. The real key may well be in the army's East Bank urban and northern elements which have assumed increasingly responsible positions in the military hierarchy. The King's conviction that Jordan had to have new equipment in order to satisfy his army's demands for modern arms was essentially a response to this group.